NEUSE LEVEE: EXCAVATION OF A LATE ARCHAIC AND WOODLAND SITE IN THE UPPER NEUSE RIVER BASIN, WAKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

TIP NO. R-2425

by

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PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL BRANCH
DIVISION OF HIGHWAYS

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Data recovery archaeological excavations were conducted by TRC Garrow Associates, Inc. (TRC), at the Neuse Levee site (31WA1137) for the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). The site is located at the US 401 crossing of the Neuse River north of Raleigh, North Carolina. Investigations started with a backhoe trench excavated on May 8, 1998, which was examined and described by the project geomorphologist. The main excavations were carried out by a crew of six persons between May 11 and June 24, 1998.

Fifty-eight 1 x 1 m excavation units containing 547 levels were excavated. Excavations were concentrated in two large blocks with five smaller units testing the outlying parts of the site. Numerous soil, OCR (Oxidizable Carbon Ratio), phytolith, sediment grain size, and geochemical samples were also taken. The numbers of excavation units and samples taken conform to the parameters of the Data Recovery Plan prepared by the NCDOT and approved by the Office of State Archaeology.

Over 11,500 artifacts were recovered from these units, including 199 prehistoric ceramic fragments and more than 11,480 pieces of chipped stone. Twenty-one diagnostic projectile points, as well as biface and biface fragments, were found. The projectile points include Savannah River and Gypsy specimens, as well as various large and small triangular forms, and date to the Late Archaic and Woodland periods (between about 5000 B.C. and A.D. 1500). The majority of the projectile points above 40 cm below surface (cmbs) were of Woodland vintage; those below were of Archaic age. The hafted bifaces in the levels below 40 cmbs included identifiable Savannah River points of two distinctive morphologies, but more importantly contained a large number of forms with either bipointed or bistemmed ends. Twenty-one bihafted scrapers and seven hafted perforators were found along with other more commonly seen tools. The tool assemblage seems to be related to a complex construction enterprise involving compositing of multiple materials, perhaps the construction of watercraft.

The presence of a Late Woodland component complements data from Early Woodland sites that have recently been excavated upstream on Wakefield Creek. Comparisons with these and other sites suggests that the settlement pattern shifted from the broken terrain around the Falls of the Neuse to the flatter and more arable lands above and below the Fall Line during the Late Woodland. Neuse Levee seems to have been a construction workshop during the Late Archaic and a waystation during the Woodland. Debitage indicators shift from the Archaic to the Woodland from locally sourced lithic materials during the Archaic to exotic cherts and quartzite, as well as local quartz, in the Woodland. Fewer primary flakes and more usable medial fragments of flakes were found in the later assemblage. It appears that a shift occurred in the Late Woodland to a more mobile settlement pattern and an economy related to the Piedmont rather than the Coastal Plain, unlike the Archaic and Early Woodland.

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For TRC, Joel D. Gunn served as Principal Investigator and William F. Stanyard as Field Director. David Leigh conducted the geomorphology study. Paul Webb acted as project manager and coordinated the logistics of fieldwork and report preparation. The field crew included Bruce Idol, Matt Jorgenson, Joe Hefner, Riley Gunn, Sterling Howard, Ross Hartley, Steve Hatch, and Bill Duckworth. Steve Hatch and Matt Jorgenson processed artifacts. Randy Kuppless prepared the report graphics and Heather Kennedy copy-edited the report text.